

Abstract 155

TITLE: Developing Faith-Based Interventions for African American Church-Going Adolescents
Using a Theology of Prevention

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ISSUE: African American churches provide networks of social support addressing unmet health and human service needs. Yet, church sponsored HIV/AIDS intervention efforts targeting African American youth are practically nonexistent. Faith-based prevention programs targeting African American church-going adolescents (AACGA) are needed.

SETTING: A pilot program in a Southeastern metropolitan area provided HN prevention-based religious education workshops for AACGA (ages 12-18).

PROJECT: To address this issue, workshop curricula based on a *theology* of caring about HIV/AIDS was used during one-day sessions that challenged AACGA to consider behavioral responses of the biblical Jesus to the socially-outcast and physically ill. AACGA explored their responses to the AIDS pandemic as African American persons-of-faith. Researchers measured AIDS knowledge, awareness of gospel care narratives, risk perception, sexual attitudes and behaviors. Four-week post-tests were administered to measure retention and compare personal reports of risk and sexual behavior.

RESULTS: AACGA in this program were AIDS-smart, had many misconceptions about risk, were sexually active and practiced limited safer sex behaviors. They were aware of caring behaviors associated with the biblical Jesus as role model. These young people retained knowledge of biblical examples of caring, reported more realistic risk perception and limited unsafe sexual practices four weeks after the workshop.

LESSONS LEARNED: Church-sponsored, prevention-based religious education may prove effective at limiting unsafe sexual behaviors among AACGA. If prevention curricula are developed and incorporated at four-week intervals within regular training programs of African American churches, healthy choices may be sustained within this population. To that end, this program advocates age-and gender-appropriate Sunday school, bible study and youth activity curricula and training based on a *theology of prevention*. Such curricula can be developed to support theological and moral principles of local churches and their affiliations. Outlines of religious education programs featuring a *theology of prevention* are provided.

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